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ABSTRACT

Improvement in self-concept may facilitate improvement in other areas such as learning and achievement. If the self-concept is formed through experiences with the environment, interactions with significant others, and attributions of one's own behavior, then the classroom atmosphere may be influential in the development of a positive or negative self-concept in children. This study was conducted to determine the ability of locus of control and perception of classroom environment to successfully predict group membership in high and low self-concept children. Fourth and fifth grade students (N=107) were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (P-H), the Classroom Environment Scale (CES), and the Nowicki Strickland Children's Locus of Control Scale (N-S) in their respective classrooms. Data were analyzed using a stepwise discriminant analysis. Results of the analysis indicated that four variables in combination successfully classified 76% of the total cases. The variables and their order of entry were: (1) order and organization; (2) affiliation; (3) innovation; and (4) locus of control. These findings suggest that while the CES and the N-S did not successfully discriminate 100% of the total cases, the influence of classroom environment and locus of control on student self-concept cannot be ignored. (Author/NB)

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Locus of Control and Classroom Environment in Discriminating High and Low Self-Concept

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to determine the ability of locus of control and perception of classroom environment to successfully predict group membership in high and low self-concept children. One hundred-seven fourth and fifth grade children were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept scale (P-H), the Classroom Environment Scale (CES), and the Nowicki Strickland Children's Locus of Control Scale (N-S) in their respective classes. Data were analyzed utilizing a stepwise discriminant analysis. Results of the analysis indicated that four variables in combination ($F(4, 49) = 4.15$, $p<.01$), successfully classified 76% of the total cases. These findings suggest that while the CES and the N-S did not successfully discriminate 100% of the total cases, the influence of classroom environment and locus of control on student self-concept cannot be ignored.

Locus of Control and Classroom Environment in Discriminanting High and Low Self-Concept

The interest in self-concept arises from the assumption that an improvement in self-concept may facilitate improvements in others areas (e.g., learning, achievement). Shavelson and Bolus (1982) defined self-concept as an individual's perception of self. The self-concept is formed through experiences with the environment, interaction with significant others, and attributions of one's own behavior. Thus, self-concept plays an important role in the child's relationships with teachers, classmates, and other individuals in the academic as well as non-academic environment (Thomas, 1973). Classroom climate refers to the general feeling of students in the classroom toward themselves and toward others brought about by the various social relationships, rules of the classroom, and daily routines. Thus, the atmosphere of the classroom is influential in the development of a positive or negative self-concept in children (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1975).

Recent reseach in the area of classroom environment and self-concept indicates that teacher-student and student-student interactions are related to the developing self-concept in children (Bailey, Madonna, & Anderson, 1987). Bailey, Madonna, and Anderson (1987) reported several significant relationships between total self-concept and the perception of classroom environment, suggesting that teacher-student and student-student interactions are important to the development of self-concept in children.

Research has also identified the child's perception of locus of control (internal/external) as another construct related to self-concept in children. Locus of control develops through interaction and experience with the environment; leading the individual to perceive control over the environment (internal orientation), or to attribute control of the environment to luck, fate, chance, or powerful others (external orientation). Tavormina (1975) reported that children exhibiting an external locus of control have an overall lower self-concept than children exhibiting

an internal locus of control, indicating a higher overall self-concept in internally controlled children.

The present study sought to examine the ability of locus of control and children's perception of classroom environment to successfully discriminate between high and low self-concept in fourth and fifth grade children.

Method

Subjects

Subjects consisted of 107 fourth and fifth grade students ranging in age from 9 through 11 years, from an elementary laboratory school, located at a southern university.

Materials and Procedure

Students were administered the following inventories in a small group format: (a) Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (P-H) (Piers, 1984), (b) Classroom Environment Scale (CES), (Moos & Trickett, 1974), and (c) Nowicki Strickland Children's Locus of Control Scale (N-S) (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973). Because the CES was not specifically designed for use with elementary school aged children, all items on the respective inventories were read aloud by the examiner.

Any questions regarding any of the items were answered at that time. Administration of the three inventories lasted for approximately 90 minutes.

Results

Students were classified as either high or low self-concept on the basis of their scores on the P-H. Those students scoring less than 52 on the P-H Total Score (n = 28) were included in the low self-concept group, whereas, those students scoring greater than 62 (n = 26) were included in the high self-concept group.

Results of a stepwise discriminant analysis indicated that four variables combined to yield a statistically significant discrimination between groups, $F(4, 49) = 4.15$, $p<.01$. The variables and their order of entry were: (a) Order and Organization, (b) Affiliation, (c) Innovation, and (d) Locus of Control. Table 1 presents a summary of the results.

Results of the Classification analysis indicated that 23 out of 28 children in the low self-concept group were correctly classified, indicating an 82% accuracy rate. In the high self-concept group, 18 out of 26 children were correctly classified, for an

accuracy rate of 69%. Overall, 41 of 54 cases were correctly classified for an accuracy rate of 76%.

Discussion

These findings suggest that while perception of classroom environment and locus of control did not accurately discriminate between high and low self-concept, in 100% of the cases, they did account for a large degree of variation, and therefore, cannot be ignored. Thus, further research efforts should be directed toward the delineation of environmental variables related to the development of self-concept in children. Direct observation of the nature, number, and type of teacher-student and student-student interactions that occur in the classroom should also provide invaluable information as to environmental characteristics of self-concept not included in the CES. Positive and negative statements are one type of information from classroom ovservations that may provide objective data on other environmental variables related to self-concept.

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Table 1.

Summary of Discriminant Analysis

Step	F to to Enter	df	F Overall	df	Wilks Lambda
1	9.04*	1,52	9.04*	1,52	.85*
2	3.34*	1,51	6.40*	2,51	.79*
3	1.68	1,50	4.88*	3,50	.77*
4	1.74	1,49	4.15*	4,49	.74*

*$p < .01$.